

A good letter is pleasant and human. It sounds as if it was written by a human being to a human being. Except for very formal occasions, your letter should achieve a conversational tone.

Use "we" and "you" and other personal references. They aid understanding and have a friendly sound.

Avoid using the language of regulations, which were designed for legal purposes. You should master the subject matter and be able to explain it in your own words.

Be complete. Your letter should cover everything that is pertinent to the inquiry. A second inquiry from the same person asking for more information, or asking for an explanation of your first letter, in most cases shows that you didn't do your job satisfactorily. Handling that second inquiry costs money, too.

Beware of gobbledegook. Use the familiar word instead of the \$50 word. Technical words and phrases should be saved for a technical audience—if there are no substitutes, use them and then define them.

Make the sentences and the paragraphs short. But don't forget that short sentences can be overdone—a series of simple sentences makes for a choppy effect, so vary the structure of your sentences.

Don't make abstractions the heroes of sentences.

Many Government writers tend to express themselves in terms of ideas and abstractions instead of in terms of people and things. This bad habit is one of the hallmarks of gobbledegook, of governmentese. If you mean: "Employers refuse to hire older workers," don't write: "Refusal of employment of older workers continues." What you would be doing is substituting "refusal" (an abstraction) for "employers" (living people) as the subject of the sentence.

Use the active voice over the passive. "We received your letter" is superior to "Your letter was received." Reading a series of passive constructions is like driving to the grocery store in reverse gear—you get there eventually but it takes unnecessary time and effort.

Don't delay in getting to the point. There is no need for a long windup or for referring at length to

the letter you are answering. A private citizen doesn't write so many letters to your agency that he wouldn't remember what he asked.

Our Customers

As our customers, the American people deserve and should get the best service we can possibly provide.

If we, as private citizens, do not get service to our liking when we patronize a certain store, we can take our trade elsewhere. People can't do this when they do business with a Government agency, which in effect has a monopoly on certain information or services. So Government employees have a special obligation to try to serve their customers.

We need to develop a special spirit of public service, to give that "extra measure" that makes for more than merely satisfactory service.

A wise man once said: "I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something. And because I cannot do everything I will not refuse to do the something that I can do."

These words embody the spirit of public service for which we should strive. If each of us took them as our own words to work by, we would overnight achieve the improved public service which the President seeks and to which the American people are entitled.

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FEDERAL

EMPLOYEE FACTS



**YOU . . . and
the Public**

"... servants of the people."

Wherever they work and whatever they do, all Federal employees have one thing in common—providing service to the public.

From clerk to Cabinet officer, laborer to skilled craftsman, messenger to manager—each Government employee has been hired to serve the American people.

"None of us must ever forget that all of us are servants of the people," President Johnson has said. He has also stated that "Government has a responsibility to its citizens to administer their business with dispatch and effectiveness." And he has called on each of us to participate in a continuing campaign to improve the service Government gives to the people.

"The task of Government is to serve the public," he declared. "It has been my deep and continuing concern to assure that each American receives from his Government the fastest, most efficient, and most courteous service. As our society grows more complex and our population expands, we must explore every path in our quest to provide the best possible service for our individual citizens."

**Federal Employee Facts No. 6
September 1966**

OPM Declassification/Release Instructions on File

In response to the President's call, every Federal agency has begun a search for ways to improve its service to the public. Many improvements have already been made, and many more are planned—more convenient hours of service, faster and more responsive replies to letters, one-stop service centers, better information directories in public buildings, etc.

Such improvements are important, but the success of the President's program really rests on the responsiveness of individual employees in their day-to-day work—how well and how willingly each of us serves the people. It is not only *what* we do, equally important is the *way* in which we serve the public.

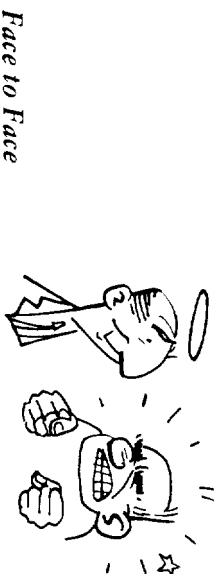
Are we always courteous and cooperative when we receive visitors to our offices? Are we cheerful and friendly when we answer the telephone? Do we show a spirit of helpfulness in trying to solve problems presented? Do we give complaints fair and openminded consideration? Are we always accurate in providing answers to questions? Are our letters really responsive, written clearly and concisely? Answers to such questions can serve as measures of how ably we serve the public.

Of course, not all of us come in direct contact with the public. But what we do still affects people and their opinion of us, our agencies, and the Federal service. Even if we "only push papers," the papers probably concern some person or persons. A widow waiting for us to process her first benefit check. A hospitalized veteran concerned about the results of a laboratory test. A soldier in Vietnam looking for a letter from home. A student wanting to know about employment opportunities in our agency. A businessman needing some statistics before making a major decision. A contractor seeking clarification on an order before starting production. You can add appropriate illustrations at your own work site.

Just pushing papers? No—*serving people*. No matter what we do or how far removed we may be from the customer, all of us are in the business of providing service to the American people.

In recent years there has been considerable discussion of the "image" of the Federal service. Probably the most important among many factors affecting public opinion about us and our agencies is the experience people have in their contacts with civil servants. To the citizen we individually serve, we *are* the Government. If we give him fair, courteous, and efficient service, he is likely to form favorable opinions about us. If not, he is likely to picture all civil servants as inefficient and indifferent. In this way each of us can have an important impact on public opinion and the image of Government service.

Here are some helpful hints for providing better service to the public—face to face, by telephone, and by letter:



Face to Face

Courtesy is the first rule. In interviewing we should always keep in mind that our job is to be patient and pleasant, no matter how trying the situation or circumstances may be.

If your visitor is critical, emotional, or impolite, don't copy or reflect his attitude or behavior. Don't argue. Don't contradict. Be tactful.

Be a good listener and show a genuine interest in your visitor's problems. Cultivate a friendly smile and a relaxed manner. Courtesy shows in tone of voice, body position, choice of words, and alert and responsive manner.

Acknowledge the presence of a visitor promptly. If you can't start talking to him immediately, tell him that you will be with him in a few minutes. Keeping a visitor waiting for recognition or shuffling papers while he waits for your attention never fails to irritate him.

Telephone Inquiries



Telephones should be manned at all times during working hours. When the telephone rings, pick up the receiver promptly even though it means interrupting another conversation. Identify your office as yourself.

If the caller asks to speak to a person in the office who is not immediately available, offer to take a message or to ask the person to return the call. If possible, indicate how soon he may expect the call. Depending upon circumstances, you could offer your assistance or suggest that someone else in the office might be able to handle the inquiry.

Some calls will come to your office in error, and the problem is how to get them to the proper person. You know the particular office that has the information; it is a simple matter to transfer the call or give the caller the correct telephone extension.

But if you are not sure, absolutely sure, tell him that you will find out and call him back.

At one time or another most of us have had the experience of picking up the phone and hearing a voice say, "This is the fifth time I have been transferred, and I'm tired of getting the runaround!" This is a tough one to field. It never should have happened in the first place, but now it is up to you to pick up the pieces. Make apology, and offer to help. Accept the query, whatever it is, and handle it to the end. In doing this you will go a long way toward erasing the original bad impression.

Effective Writing

Great writers may be born not made, but almost anyone can learn to write good, understandable prose. It takes clear thinking, mastery of the subject matter, and hard work—but the results are well worth the effort.